

California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Santa Ana Region
September 17, 2004

STAFF REPORT

ITEM: 10b.

SUBJECT: REGIONAL WATER QUALITY PRIORITIES FOR THE
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE (WMI) CHAPTER

DISCUSSION:

The Regional Board's chapter of the statewide Watershed Management Initiative (WMI) is often used by our stakeholders as a tool to guide them towards water quality projects that mutually benefit their watershed interests and the region as a whole. The relative water quality importance and priority of a nascent project can be inferred from the watersheds discussions, tables and appendices in the WMI chapter. Tables in Section 2 and in the appendices include lists of project types and needs. What the chapter lacks are clear statements of regional water quality priorities that can be used to further guide stakeholders toward worthwhile projects.

SWRCB-administered grant programs, funded with state bonds and federal grants, are placing increasing emphasis on awarding funds to projects that implement recognized regional plans, regional priorities and the WMI. Proposals for projects that derive from a WMI chapter project type or needs list that also address a regional water quality priority are more likely to receive grant funding than those that do not. Projects from an approved watershed plan (which include the Basin Plan and TMDLs) that are also WMI listed and that address a regional priority will rank higher still in the competitive grant selection process.

Staff believes the recommended Regional Water Quality Priorities list, attached, which summarizes and ranks regulatory initiatives, stakeholder interests, and other needs of the watershed, accurately represents the challenges and issues faced by today's Regional Board and its community. This priority list will be used mostly by stakeholders to help them develop grant proposals that address regional priorities, by staff to weight and rank grant proposals, and by senior staff and management to recommend that grant awards go to the most worthy projects.

Staff will incorporate any comments from the Regional Board in the final priorities list included in our WMI chapter.

Regional WMI Water Quality Priorities for Grant Projects

- 1. Projects that implement approved TMDLs, including studies called for in TMDL implementation plans.**
- 2. Projects that support development of scheduled TMDLs.**
- 3. Projects that address pollutant loadings in urban runoff discharges.**
- 4. Projects that protect and improve the quality of local groundwater resources.**
- 5. Removal and prevention of invasive, exotic aquatic and riparian vegetation to enhance and protect water quality standards, including habitat and recreation beneficial uses.**
- 6. In support of WARM, COLD, RARE, WILD, SPWN, MAR, SHEL and EST beneficial uses, projects that protect, restore and/or enhance aquatic, wetland, and riparian habitat and habitat connectivity, particularly habitat of rare, threatened and endangered species.**
- 7. Projects that support watershed management planning efforts, especially those that build local capacity in watershed management through citizen involvement and public education.**
- 8. Projects that provide tools for managing and/or enhancing access to regional water resources data, water quality data and watershed data.**

Projects that include opportunities to build or expand organizational capacity to implement watershed management will be favored.

Projects that lead to water quality improvements within the Critical Coastal Areas of the Region will be favored.